3 Methodology

In order to provide a characterization of the genre of appointment-scheduling dialogues, we proceeded as follows:

First, we analyzed the distribution of the rhetorical patterns (rhetorical analysis) and the thematic selection and progression patterns (thematic analysis) in the sample. The selection of these two discourse phenomena, typically applied to written monologue, was justified by their descriptive power: it was expected that they would provide linguistic evidence for the generic unfolding of the texts, thus contributing to the segmentation of the conversations in different stages.

Second, a generic analysis was carried out following some of the steps proposed by Eggins and Slade (1997). These steps involved: a) defining the social purpose of the genre, b) identifying and defining the stages within a genre, c) specifying the obligatory and optional stages, d) devising a structural formula to describe the genre. The identification and definition of the stages involved assigning a functional role to different text segments and asking how it contributed towards achieving the overall social purpose of the genre. In this process, the characteristic distribution of the rhetorical relations and some of the thematic patterns were used as linguistic signal or evidence for the generic structure.

3.1 Rhetorical Analysis

The analysis of the rhetorical relations in our sample was based on the original formulation of Rhetorical Structure Theory, henceforth RST (Mann and Thompson 1988). RST is a theory of text organization that takes into account the intentions of the text creator, and the effects he or she wants to achieve in the text receiver. It has been mainly applied to written monologue, though work in computational linguistics has proved its suitability for analyzing extended turns in dialogue (Fawcett and Davies 1992).

Following this proposal, we carried out a turn-by-turn analysis of the sample dialogues, examining how speakers build individual contributions to the conversation. The turn-by-turn analysis looks at each turn as a text in itself that seeks some reaction—a reaction, unlike the ones in written discourse, immediate and usually clearly recognisable. This type of analysis ignores the undoubtedly important relations holding between turns, but approximates the original RST analyses in that it looks at text as the product of one mind that projects towards a recipient[4].

The basic unit of analysis used in this study was the SDU (see Section 2.1), which is roughly equivalent to the information unit of Chafe (1980). The problems in applying RST to these dialogues had to do with their very nature. In naturally occurring dialogue there are different elements pertaining to the specific genre, such as greetings and goodbyes, and there are also different degrees of spontaneity in the language, such as the presence of self-talk versus the more planned turns in which a speaker's utterance evolves in an easily

definable pattern. As a consequence, the *completedness* constraint in RST (that all units of the text enter in a relation) had to be relaxed, leaving some instances of self-talk outside the analysis. The results of the RST analysis are discussed in Section 4.1.

3.2 Thematic Analysis

In order to uncover the thematic patterning in our sample we carried out two types of analyses: first we identified those elements that are picked as Themes, that is, as departing points in each utterance (thematic selection); second, we analyzed how those Themes are linked in the discourse, that is, whether current Themes have been mentioned before and, if so, whether they were mentioned in the Theme or Rheme part of a previous utterance (thematic progression). For both types of analysis, the unit is the clause, whether independent or dependent (adverbial clauses), but not embedded (clausal subjects, relative clauses, etc.). For dependent clauses preceding the main clause, both were considered for the thematic analysis. This ensured that the units were the same as for the rhetorical analysis.

3.2.1 Thematic Selection

For the thematic selection analysis, we followed Halliday's characterization of this descriptive category as "the point of departure of the message" (1994:37) and identified Themes as those elements which come in first position in the clause up to and including the first element that has a function in transitivity. We classified Themes according to three parameters: a) their metafunctional type, b) their semantic type, and c) their degree of markedness within the structure of the clause.

According to the first parameter, Themes were annotated as *textual, interpersonal* and/or *ideational* in the sample corpus. We use the label *ideational*, not *topical*, to avoid equating Theme and topic of the sentence (a distinction made by Downing 1991). Examples (1) through (5), which are simplified versions of corpus examples, provide an illustration of the type of Theme selections found in the corpus. Textual Theme is *italicized*, interpersonal Theme is in **bold** face, and ideational Theme is <u>underlined</u>. All of those (textual, interpersonal and ideational) are the Theme of the sentence. Thus, in Example (4), the Theme is *what days*, which is interpersonal and ideational at the same time. In Example (5), the Theme of the sentence is *oh, unfortunately, I*, each word representing one Theme type.

(1) <u>I</u> have to get home by five p.m. every day the next two weeks.

(2) ...*and* <u>Monday</u>'s pretty bad for me.

(3) **Are** <u>you</u> free on Wednesday the seventeenth?

(4) **<u>What days</u>**

a) *constant* progression, when a Theme that is not new derives from a previous Theme or Themes (also known as themic); b) *linear* progression: when the Theme derives from a

Simple contiguous linear

etc.), to an element mentioned earlier in the conversation, then we can classify it according to the categories displayed in Figure 1. The other type not represented in the figure, apart from New, is the Syntactic type. This refers to expletive pronouns, such as *it, there*, when they act as the grammatical Subject, but have no referent. The results of the thematic progression analysis are presented in Section 4.2.2 below.

3.3 Generic analysis

For the generic analysis of the sample, we followed some of the steps proposed by Eggins and Slade (1997:230ff). More specifically, we proceeded as follows:

Firstly, we tried to find a definition of the social purpose of the genre. This step involved describing and labelling the primary function of the genre studied. For example, whether the primary function was to tell a story, to perform a task, to gossip about someone, etc. In Section 4.3, we will comment on the functional label assigned to the conversations of our sample corpus.

Secondly, we identified and differentiated the generic stages of these conversations. This was achieved by analyzing the functions that different text chunks fulfilled with respect to the whole. Thus, in the example conversation below (10), there is no greeting or opening phase; the speaker proceeds directly to the body of the conversation (the task performance)

fjyk_au_02: okay. {seos} on the seventh, eighth, and the tenth. I can meet you, /h#/ /h#/ /ls/ in the morning. {seos} /ls/ anytime after nine, o'clock in the morning would be good for me.

Acceptance of detailed proposal + Condition

facr_au_03: /uh/ August eighth at nine thirty would be, fine. {seos} if, that's okay with you as well.

Confirmation of acceptance + Additional proposal

fjyk_au_04: okay nine thirty in the morning, /h#/ /ls/ /h#/ until, eleven thirty. {seos} /h#/ /ls/ /h#/ and then perhaps we can <grab some> /um/ get some lunch afterwards. {seos}

Place proposal

how 'bout, you come over to my office. and then, /ls/ /h#/ perhaps we can go over to the conference room that's right next to my office.

Acceptance of additional proposal

facr_au_05: /ls/ /h#/ that would be fine on August eighth at nine thirty, {seos} /h#/ /um/ /ls/ I would love to get some lunch as well afterwards,

Closing

fjyk_au_06: /ls/ /h#/ okay, I'm looking forwarde toels/ /h#/ 44 -1.16dvz8BbyeBbye

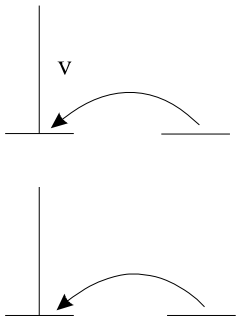
	Frequency	%
Antithesis	1	0.17
Background	13	2.24
Circumstance	5	0.86
Concession	71	12.24
Contrast	9	1.55
Condition	66	11.38
Elaboration	166	28.62
Enablement	10	1.72
Evaluation	8	1.38
Evidence	0	0.00
Interpretation	1	0.17
Joint	29	5.00
Justify	34	5.86
Motivation	3	0.52
Non-Volitional Cause	37	6.38
Non-Volitional Result	43	7.41
Otherwise	4	0.69
Purpose	10	1.72
Restatement	28	4.83
Sequence	7	1.21
Solutionhood	7	1.21
Summary	4	0.69
Volitional Cause	7	1.21
Volitional Result	17	2.93
n	580	

Table 1. Rhetorical relations in the corpus

Example (11) presents some of those relations, as illustrated in Figure 2. After repeating the dates on which the other speaker is available (which was part of the previous turn), speaker FCKA expresses her availability and the reason for it (span 3, signalled by *because*), and then a Volitional Result, the desire to meet on that date, submitted to the evaluation of the other speaker in span 4.

(11) fcka_ffmw_10

fcka_10_03: /h#/ [1] well, /uh/ <you,> you're available, after, /um/ the seventeenth? /h#/ in the week, <seventeenth,> /eh/ seventeenth, the eighteenth, the nineteenth, the twentieth, the twenty first? {seos} /h#/ [2] well, the seventeenth and the twentieth would be the most convenient for me {seos} [3] because I have, nothing planned for these two days. {seos} /h#/ [4] so, what do you think.


V

ffmw_10_02: /h#/ I forgot to tell you, /uh/ Christina, that, /h#/ I have, /um/ a vacation planned, {seos} /h#/ I'm leaving this S

	Frequency	%
Textual Themes	328	41.05
Interpersonal Themes	244	30.53
Ideational Themes	799	
Total, simple Themes	321	40.17
Total, multiple Themes	478	59.82
Total number of Themes	799	

Table 3. Theme Selection and Metafunction

Within ideational themes, the distribution of the different semantic types also varies in our sample: the most frequent semantic type is Participant Themes, followed by Circumstance Themes and by Process Themes. Table 4 displays the presence of Themes as related to Transitivity.

Participants are typically unmarked Themes (*I am free*), although sometimes marked, as an Adjunct (*For me that's no good*). (In this paper, we are restricting the label Participant to one of the interlocutors in the conversation.) Circumstances are dates and places, and they can be unmarked, reflecting the realization of a date or a time as the Subject of a relational Process, attributive or Circumstantial (*Tuesday is good for me*). Circumstances can also be marked, as an Adjunct (*On Tuesdays*

With respect to the distribution of semantic types, there are a few patterns we can observe. There is a slightly high presence of Pr

performing: propose a date, accept or reject a date, or other act. We considered position in the turn because it might indicate whether a speaker continues the Theme from the previous turn, and whether they use markedness to indicate a new speech act. The classification is presented in Table 6.

	Propose	**Accept**	**Reject**	**Other**	**% (of marked Themes, *n*=70)**
Beginning of turn	8	6	10	0	34.28
Middle of turn	14	4	8	6	45.71
End of turn	10	3	1	0	20

Table 6. Marked Themes within turns, with their function

Although the numbers are small, it seems that marked Themes occur mostly in the middle of a turn, and mostly to propose a new date. The use of a marked Theme in these cases could serve as a signal for a new date proposal. For example, in (20) there are two clauses with marked Themes that occur in the middle of the turn. The marked Themes indicate the beginning of a new proposal, after a previous proposal has been rejected. In most cases, the use of a marked Theme seems to bring dates to focus, as a reminder of the date being discussed.

(20) fcre_fjsl_1

fjsl_1_02: /ls/ /h#/ well I'd like to make it as soon as possible, {seos} but I'm not free for two hours, /um/, on, Monday the eighth. {seos} /h#/ however <u>on the ninth</u> I'm free after twelve o'clock, {seos} and <u>on the tenth</u> I'm free before four o'clock because I have a doctor's appointment then. {seos} do any of those times fit your schedule?

4.2.2 Thematic progression patterns

The results of the TP analysis are summarized in Table 7. The table presents the results in three large groups: constant, linear, and other. The latter refers to Themes that could not be linked to previous information, and therefore exhibited no progression. Those, in turn, fall into two categories: new Themes, those that were introduced in the conversation for the first time; and syntactic Themes, expletives such as *it* and *there*, which have no semantic content.

In general, speakers in our sample tend to use constant (themic) more often than linear (rhemic) thematic progression patterns. Constant Themes are 43.56% of the total Themes, whereas linear represent 18.53%.

Constant (Thematic)				Linear (Rhemic)					Other	
Simple		Multiple		Simple		Multiple				
Cont.	**Gap.**	**Int.**	**Sep.**	**Cont.**	**Gap.**	**Int.**	**Sep.**	**Complex**	**New**	**Synt.**
128	208	5	7	97	44	0	3	4	287	16
16.02 %	26.03%	0.63%	0.88%	12.14%	5.51%	-	0.38%	0.5%	35.92%	2%
Total = 43.56 %				Total = 18.53 %					Total = 37.92 %	

Table 7. Thematic Progression in the corpus

(cont.: contiguous; gap.: gapped; int.: integration; sep.: separation; synt.: syntactic)

As for constant patterns, gapped are more frequent than contiguous patterns. In both cases, the higher percentages are a result of the repetition of Subject pronouns throughout the conversation, as in Example (21). Speaker FRJP uses *I* in her first turn, which she repeats again when she holds the floor[11]. Subject pronouns are not, however the only category in this pattern. In (22), speaker FAMS uses *the seven* as the Theme of her first utterance, a Theme that she has picked up from the previous speaker's Theme.

(21) frjp_mpmm_1

frjp_1_01: /ls/ /h#/ /ah/ Peter. this is Renee. {seos} I need, to schedule a two hour meeting with you, between March, eighth, and March nineteenth?

mpmm_1_02: okay, I'm completely free, on the seventeenth of March. /h#/ so, let's try that date, first.

frjp_1_03: /ls/ /h#/ /um/ that day, I have a seminar, from nine to four thirty, {seos} and I'm free after that, but not until, /h#/ then.

(22) fams_fcld_au

fams_au_01: /h#/ /h#/ /uh/ when would you like to go in front of the board, {seos} I have a pretty hectic schedule in August? {seos} /h#/ but /um/, the seventh, I'm, pretty much free, if you wanna meet then.

fcld_au_02: /ls/ /h#/ the seven probably won't work out for me, because I have a meeting, from three to five, with, Sebastian, …

The differences among themic and rhemic and within contiguous or gapped can also be categorized in terms of whether they are derived or not. With the exception of multiple types, which are always derived, a total of 22.9% of the Themes are derived, versus 36.79% of non-derived Themes. There is, then, a slight preference for repeating the previous Theme

verbatim. This could be due to the fact that most of the Themes are very simple (*I, Tuesday, afternoon*), and do not lend themselves to rephrasing.

As to the distribution of TP patterns within the dialogues, Table 8 presents a specification of the segments where TP patterns appear. These segments have been labelled according to the function they fulfill with respect to the whole, which, as will be explained in section 4.3 below, may be considered as generic substages within what we have labelled as the Task-Performance stage. Openings are not

be labelled as “task-oriented conversation”. This is based on the fact that, for example, by contrast to other types of conversation such as casual conversation, gossip, or storytelling, in these conversations interlocutors have to perform a task of some kind, more specifically, scheduling an appointment. Other types of task-oriented conversations include service encounters, whether face-to-face (in a store, for instance), or via telephone (calling a travel agent).

2. Identification of generic stages

In most dialogues we identified three clear generic stages: an Opening stage, followed by what in the literature is called the body or message of the conversation (Stenström 1994:135), and which we will call the Task-Performance stage, and a Closing stage. This identification was based on the social or practical purpose fulfilled by each text chunk or stage. Thus, the social purpose of the Opening stage is to establish rapport between the speakers; the practical purpose of the Task-Performance stage is to arrange a meeting, which also has the social purpose of maintaining face for both speakers; the social purpose of the Closing stage is to close off the proceedings in good terms, with also a practical purpose of making sure that the meeting has been arranged successfully. The tripartite

the previous turn. Our classification is different because it focuses on a confirmation function for the Closing stage.

(24) feas_mtmr_11

mtmr_11_06: */ls/ /h#/ /eh/ let's call it two, {seos} and I'll take a long lunch after my seminar.*

feas_11_07: *okay,* /h#/ that's, Friday the eleventh, /h#/ at two, from two to four? {seos} /ls/ /h#/ I'll see you then. /h#/

mtmr_11_08: /h#/ /ls/ /h#/ you got it,

While the Opening and Closing stages are shared with other types of conversation, such as telephone calls (Schegloff and Sacks 1973, Stenström 1994), the Task-Performance stage is characteristic of this type of conversations whose main purpose is to schedule an appointment. As explained in Section 2 above, speakers with two conflicting agendas covering a two- to four-week period were asked to schedule an appointment lasting for at least two hours sometime within those two to four weeks. The conversations in the corpus never finished before the speakers had arranged a time to meet. This fact determines the generic structure of these conversations: while the Opening stage is optional, the Task-Performance stage is an obligatory element. The Closing stage, however, was always present in the conversations analyzed. We believe it fulfills both a social and a practical function, i.e., the speakers take leave, which is socially necessary (but not obligatory), but they also use this stage to make sure the appointment is settled, and there are no further changes.

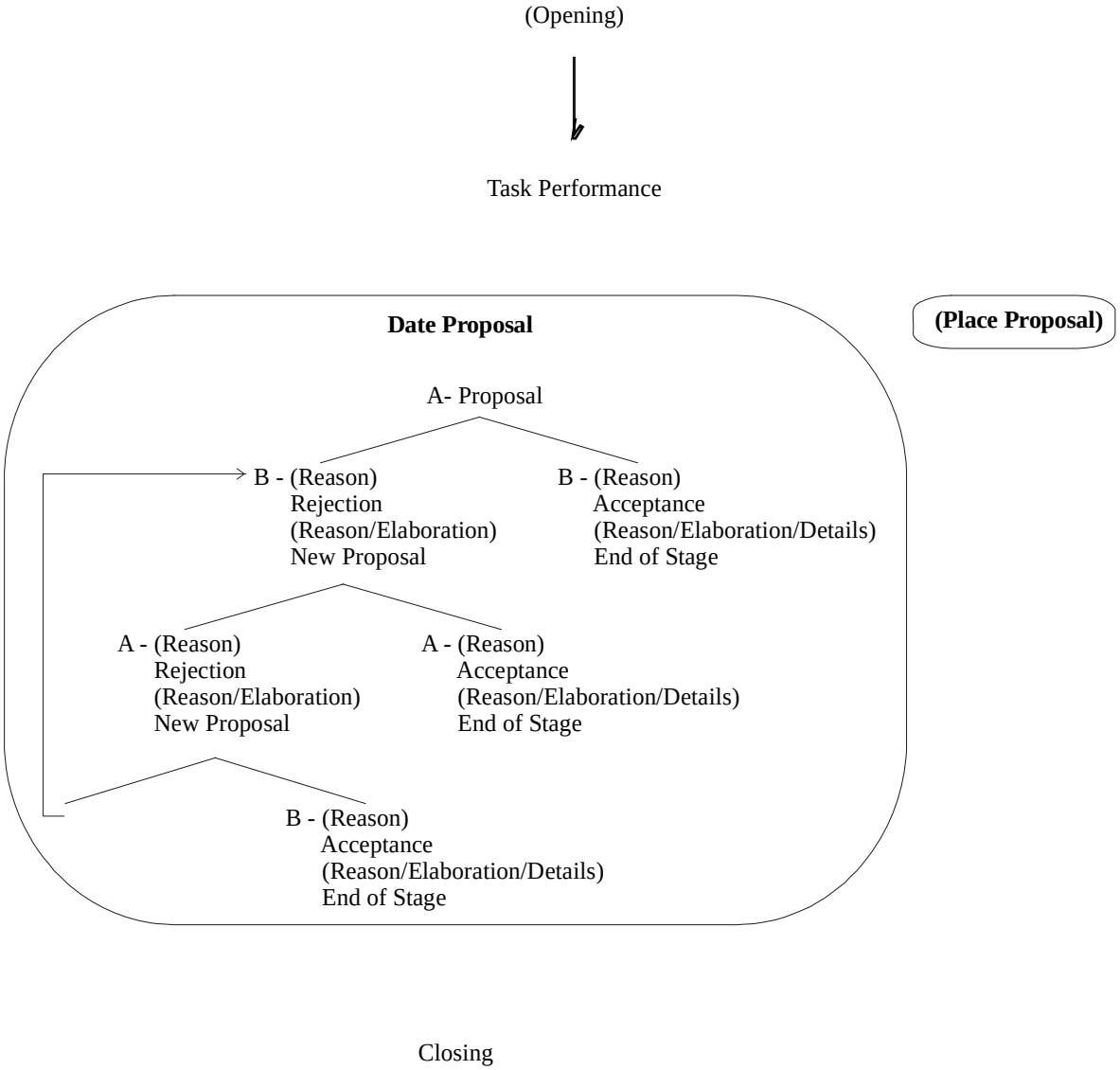
The Task-Performance stage itself is composed of different substages. These fulfil different communicative functions which contribute towards achieving the overall social purpose of the genre: scheduling an appointment. The sequence of these substages is as follows (Figure 4): first, one of the interlocutors (speaker A) makes a proposal for a meeting. His/her interlocutor will then follow one of the following paths: to reject or to accept the date proposed. In either case, optional reasons are offered for rejecting or accepting the proposed meeting. If the proposal is accepted, details about the meeting place or other particulars may follow. Speakers would then move to the Closing stage.

If, on the contrary, the proposal is rejected, the same speaker makes a new proposal. This can be now accepted or rejected by speaker A. If an acceptance takes place, the conversation proceeds to the Closing stage. If there is a rejection, speaker A will propose yet another date, starting again a recursive sequence of rejection/acceptance, plus the accompanying details. In any case, the conversations were never finished until speakers had agreed on a time to meet.

3. Specification of optional and obligatory stages

Figure 4 below illustrates the proposed generic structure of our sample corpus. Conversations may start at the Opening stage, and optionally directly at the Task-Performance stage. This is represented by parentheses around the stage name in the figure.

We believe that the Opening stage was optional in some cases because the conversations sometimes started after an introduction to the task and the equipment. The speakers then went on to perform the task directly. This might be a result of the situation in which the conversations were recorded, and therefore not the case with more spontaneous conversations. The Closing stage is not optional, because it helps bring closure to the task itself. The Task-Performance stage consists of one or more Date-Proposal stages, and an optional Place-Proposal stage. When Place Proposal was present, it only appeared once: speakers agreed promptly on where to meet. The recursiveness of Date-Proposal stages varied in the conversations from one to seven, i.e., up to seven possible dates were proposed before an agreement was reached.



	Rhetorical patterns	Thematic patterns	
		Markedness	Thematic progression
Opening	Solutionhood		
Task Performance			
Proposal	Solutionhood, Motivation, Background	Marked	New
Rejection	Non-Volitional Cause or Result, Concession	Marked	Constant
Acceptance	Volitional Cause or Result		Constant
New Proposal	Ref28M.terns ResulpseV910ta2 Tc -0.0005( )TjEMCde1C[g(5 >>BDC /TT0 1 Tf-0 rns Tn Tf2d0o2oMC ET315.24		

proposal; Volitional Cause or Result to accept a

The present study opens up a number of avenues of research. One of these would be to investigate whether the rhetorical and thematic patterns studied in this paper are specific of this type of task-oriented conversation, or whether similar patterns can be found in other types of task-oriented conversation, such as, for example, service encounters or business meetings. Another issue worth investigating is the similarities and differences in the distribution of rhetorical patterns across languages, as initially explored in Taboada (in

11. Thematic *I* in successive utterances by different speakers is not treated as contiguous, since the reference is different. The second turn of Example (21) contains another *I* in thematic position. That, however, refers to speaker MPMM, and is not part of the TP pattern initiated in the first turn by speaker FRJP.

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